

# INSTALLATION GUIDE FOR HANDMADE TILE EXTENDED VERSION



The true beauty of handmade tile is that no two are exactly alike. Because our tile is made by hand from start to finish, you can expect to see color, size, and grout joint variation in your installation. Each tile has its own character and there are some very important steps to ensure a timely installation with a breathtaking outcome.

There are significant differences between installing handmade tile and machine-made tile. If you are an experienced handmade tile setter, these guidelines will be a refresher course. If you are new to handmade tile setting, consider this Handmade Tile Installation 101.

## OVERVIEW

All successful handmade tile installations are the result of following these steps: inspect, sort, dry layout, install, seal, grout- seal again if needed, and above all... HAVE FUN throughout the artistic process.

## TIME

These steps are necessary when installing handmade tile. They take time, but they save time. Allow for extra time so you don't feel rushed or tempted to skip any of these steps.

## INSPECTION

Once your tile order arrives unpack and inspect all tiles. If there is any damage, please contact us ASAP at [care@mercurymosaics.com](mailto:care@mercurymosaics.com). We can replace damaged tile at no cost to you if we are contacted within 90 days of your order's arrival.

Installation constitutes final acceptance of the product.

## SORTING LOOSE SUBWAY TILE

All tile boxes should be opened, inspected, sorted and laid out before you begin installation. Because of the handmade nature of our tile there will be variation in the sizing. This step involves sorting and grouping tiles by size to ensure even columns and rows of tile during installation.

Make stacks of 5-10 tiles and sort by width. Turn each stack on edge and sort into narrow tile, medium tile and wider tile stacks. After sorting into these groups, check the length by making stacks of 5-10 tiles that are the same width and turning them on their end. Just as when sorting for width, sort for length by pulling out tile and placing them into stacks based on length. You should have tile groupings of narrow-short, narrow-medium, narrow-long, medium-short, medium-medium, medium-long, wide-short etc.

As you are sorting you may come across tile that has some cupping and warping. This is normal with handmade tile, but tile with too much bend can be put aside and used for cut pieces.

Use tiles of a similar height in each row so that the horizontal grout lines between rows will be relatively uniform. Do not mix tile heights in the same row. It is also important to be aware of the varied tile lengths so that your staggered vertical grout lines will stay reasonably aligned as you progress throughout the installation. For stacked layouts, you will want to match tile dimensions horizontally, and then vertically on the row up so that the grout lines in both directions are relatively even. When sorting is complete, do a dry layout. During the dry layout you will distribute color variances. Sorting takes time, but greatly speeds up the installation and dramatically improves the outcome.

## SORTING MESH-MOUNTED TILE

If you are installing mesh-mounted tile with a high color variation, it is easiest to sort the sheets by color variation before doing a dry layout.

## DRY LAYOUT

- Lay all tile on the floor or countertop in the **exact** way that it will be installed.
- Evenly distribute color variances throughout your layout.
- We recommend 1/8" grout joints as a guideline, but the grout joints may vary slightly due to the irregular shapes of the tiles. (Wedge spacers are very useful for installation.)
- Pay attention to how the tile meets the edges of your installation. Adjust rows to avoid needing "slivers" of cut tile at the edges.

If more tile is needed to complete an installation wait until you receive your add-on order to begin your installation. Because our tile is made in batches there might be a slight difference in the color, and you will want to mix your first and second order together for an even color distribution.

Always, ALWAYS inspect, sort and do a dry layout before installing handmade tile. This is crucial because of size and color variations. The time spent on the inspection, sorting and dry layout will greatly reduce the time of the entire installation. Seriously... you'll be glad you did it.

## SINGLE ROW INSTALLATION

When installing a single row of handmade tile, dry lay them out end-to-end, making sure that each end matches the dimension of the ones it touches. If you have to use an asymmetric tile because of limited supply (not likely), use it at the end of the tile run, or carefully shave down the edge on the tile saw and smooth it with a tile rubbing stone.

## ADHESIVE

Choose an adhesive that is specifically recommended for use on the surface you will be tiling.

**\*Make sure to follow the package guidelines for application, clean-up and dry time.**

- Use sufficient adhesive behind each tile. When tile is cupped, you will need to "back butter" the individual tile by spreading adhesive with a notched trowel directly on the back of the tile rather than on the surface you are adhering it to. Make sure to give the tile a little twist when installing to ensure it properly bonds to the surface. If it does not properly bond there will be a void space behind the tile, which can cause the tile to break or loosen and fall off.

## USE OF WET SAW

Use a sharp blade on your wet saw for precise cuts and to prevent chipping of tile or glaze. If a cut edge will be visible, use a tile rubbing stone to smooth the edge prior to installation.

## SEALING

We strongly recommend sealing our tile before grouting. Make sure to follow the directions on the package for best results. The sealer that we recommend is Aqua Mix Sealers Choice Gold.

When using dark grout with light tiles, light grout with dark tiles, or any tiles with a “crackled” glaze, it is especially important to apply a penetrating sealer prior to grouting to prevent the grout colorant from staining the tiles. We recommend testing the grout on a scrap of tile to show you and the client what to expect.

## GROUT

Use SANDED grout for Mercury Mosaics handmade tile. We recommend 1/8” grout joints as a guideline, but the grout line widths may vary due to the irregular shapes of the tiles. Grout will typically be darker when wet and lighten up as it dries.

Read all package instructions regarding mixing, slake time, setup time, application, sealing and clean-up prior to use. Slaking (allowing the grout sit 5-10 minutes and remixing before use) gives the liquid time to thoroughly penetrate the dry material and allows the grout to form strong chemical bonds that increase durability. Do not add more liquid to grout that is becoming too dry to use. Instead, discard and make another batch. Only make enough grout to last 20-30 minutes.

## FLOOR TILE

If Mercury Mosaics tiles are being installed onto a floor, verify that the material that will be underneath the tile is a sufficient sub-floor material. Choose an adhesive specifically recommended for that type of sub-floor. The adhesive container/thinset bag will list what surfaces it is appropriate for. Floors contract and expand with changes in humidity and temperature so it is crucial to use the correct bonding material for your sub-floor type to prevent grout cracking, tile loosening and to ensure the longevity of your tile floor.

While tile has a high compressive strength, using extra adhesive under any cupped tiles is especially important when installing floor tiles because there will be weight pressing on them and a void space underneath. If this is not done, tiles corners may crack off or the center of tiles may break anywhere there isn’t sufficient adhesive/thinset to support them. If stools, chairs or tables will be used on the floor, make sure they have rubber protectors or felt pads on all legs to avoid scratching or chipping tile. Replace these protectors as they begin to wear.

\*\*\*SLIP - If you plan to use tile on a floor, especially in a high traffic area, we recommend using an anti-slip sealant that meets or exceeds COF requirements for ASTM, OSHA, ADA, Canadian and US Government industrial safety standards. Our recommendation is No Skidding Industrial Anti-Slip Floor Treatment.

## TUB/SHOWER TILE

When installing Mercury Mosaics tile in showers or tub surrounds be sure to pre-seal the tile with a coat of penetrating sealer. After grouting, add another coat of penetrating sealer over the entire area. If you use an “enhancing” sealer, the grout will permanently darken, as if wet.

## TILING OVER BRICK

It is possible to tile over brick if the brick is in good condition. The basic steps include cleaning the brick, applying a coat of thinset to the brick with a flat trowel to create a level surface, allowing the thinset to cure, and then installing your tile as normal.

## TILING AROUND ELECTRICAL BOXES

When tiling around electrical boxes, use the flattest tiles to ensure that the cover plate lays smoothly on the wall.

## WORKING WITH MULTIPLE INSTALLERS

If you have multiple installers working on your project, make sure that everyone is on the same page, using the same grout spacing, and following the recommendations listed above. Less experienced handmade tile installers should be observed frequently.

## FINAL NOTES

Close attention to detail is **crucial** when installing handmade tile. The process can be really fun and the results will be beautiful if you follow our recommendations to guide the installation. Every hour, take a moment to step back and view “the big picture”. This makes it much easier to spot and correct issues with color distribution, out-of-level tiles or rows, uneven grout spacing, etc. before the adhesive dries. You will be surprised by what you can see from 10 feet away that you can’t see from 3 feet away.

Handmade tiles are loved and cherished because they aren’t cookie-cutter symmetric and often have variation in their color. These characteristics make installing handmade tile quite different from installing machine-made tile. Following these guidelines is crucial to a successful installation and will prevent a multitude of issues that could otherwise arise.

1. Inspect
2. Sort
3. Dry layout
4. Install
5. Seal
6. Grout - seal again if needed, and above all...
7. HAVE FUN throughout the artistic process!

### If You Have Any Questions:

Don’t hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. Our Care Specialists can be reached by phone at (612) 236-1646 or by email at [care@mercurymosaics.com](mailto:care@mercurymosaics.com). We consider everyone who installs our tile as part of our handmade tile family. And when your installation is completed, PLEASE, send us photos!